INTRIGUING TALE

Witness to slaying of JFK says she saw gunmen, gave chase

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The truth be told, Jean Hill went to Dealey Plaza trying to attract the attention of a cute police officer. But that alone probably wouldn't have drawn 300 people to listen intently to her every word 28 years later.

No, Ms. Hill was the center of at-

■ 'JFK' film opening. 5C

tention Friday morning because for the first time she was describing publicly what she saw in Dealey Plaza the day that President John F. Kennedy was killed.

And for the assassination buffs gathered in Dallas for the three-day Assassination Symposium on John F. Kennedy, her account was captivating.

"I hope it went OK," Ms. Hill said after the first part of her panel discussion at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion. "I don't come out with what I have to say very easily."

For many of the people attending the conference, this was why they made the trip from 30 states and five countries. Seven eyewitnesses to either the shooting or the handling of the president's body were there to tell their tales and take questions.

Each audience member had a particular aspect of the assassination or subsequent investigation that intrigued them, and they came to learn more.

"Now that knoll where you saw a gunman has a tree on it. Was he on the right or left of the tree from your vantage point?" one man asked Ms. Hill, although the significance of the answer was not ex-

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The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

Jean Hill, who saw the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, signs autographs Friday at a conference on the slaying.

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plained.

The assassination buffs were more enthusiastic than usual Friday after a high-powered keynote speech that morning by Dr. Cyril Wecht, an expert on Mr. Kennedy's autopsy.

He urged the crowd to hound local newspapers into reporting more on the assassination. He also rallied the audience in an attack on the Warren Commission report, which concluded that Mr. Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, firing a rifle from the Texas School Book Depository.

Dr. Wecht got a thunderous ovation when he demanded that every library in the country move the report to the fiction section.

Later in the morning, the eyewitnesses got their turn.

Ms. Hill, a third-grade teacher from H.S. Thompson Learning Center, told of persuading a police officer to let her and a friend stand in the median so they could get a better look at the president.

"Well, actually there were a couple cute motorcycle officers that we were interested in, and they couldn't see us if we were in a crowd," she said.

The two women were looking at the book depository and the grassy knoll on Elm Street west of the depository — where conspiracy theorists believe the fatal shot came from — when the shots started to ring out. Ms. Hill insists that she saw two gunmen, including one who was firing from behind a picket fence on the knoll.

She decided to chase one of the men as he ran, but two men in trench coats grabbed her by the shoulder and instead took her to the Dallas County Records Building. There, she said, they disputed her account of hearing four to six shots, and then issued a stern warning:

" 'You would be very wise to keep your mouth shut,' " she recalled one of the men telling her. "I never have been that wise, I guess."

Through the years, Ms. Hill has never made a secret of what she saw. Although she has answered questions from some authors, she has been hesitant to discuss it with people investigating the conspiracy.

Then this spring, movie director Oliver Stone came to visit. He was working on *JFK*, his soon-to-be-released movie about the assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

"Oliver had dinner with me, and really he was the one who gave me the courage to tell my story," she said.

So she has collaborated with Dallas author Bill Sloan for *JFK: The Last Dissenting Witness*, which is due out next year.

In the meantime, she saw her experience re-created in the Dealey Plaza scenes of Mr. Stone's movie.

The combination of the movie and her book is likely to lead to more speaking engagements, Ms. Hill conceded. Her appearance Friday already brought a request to appear on *The Maury Povich Show*, a syndicated TV talk show.

It's all rather overwhelming for a woman who's real motivation that infamous day was landing a date. Which begs the obvious question about the success of her romantic endeavor.

"Yeah, I definitely caught his eye," she said. But that's one of the secrets she *is* keeping.